



The Eckstein Shahnama: An Ottoman Book of Kings

Will Kwiatkowski

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The great Persian poet Firdausi's epic Shahnama, or 'Books of Kings', written at the turn of the eleventh century CE, is a seamless tapestry of historical and legendary material prominently featuring battles and individual struggles with fierce demons and enemy champions. The first known illustrations of the poem date to the early fourteenth century CE.

The splendidly illustrated and illuminated late sixteenth-century Eckstein Shahnama (so called from a distinguished previous owner, Bernard Eckstein) is one of an important group of so-called 'truncated' Shahnamas which end Firdausi's narrative with Alexander the Great. These manuscripts were long regarded as Persian, but new research suggests that, though the text is Persian and the style of the painting is apparently Persian, they were actually produced in imitation of Persian examples by Turkish workshops.

This richly illustrated study confirms the Ottoman origin of this and other manuscripts in the group and demonstrates the Eckstein Shahnama in particular to be a representative example of Ottoman manuscript painting and to have had itself a significant influence on later production.

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